



Fall/Winter 2025

NEWS



Needed more than ever, Adoption Rhode Island expands proven programs and brings our deep understanding and expertise to launching new life-changing solutions.

Strong futures filled with possibility are taking shape because of the strength, talent and resilience of young people finding their path forward with ARI and you by their side.

Growth of Teen Focus Program aims to keep more youth in school overcoming barriers to realizing their potential.

Young people are falling behind in school and many don't make it to graduation. We see it in the statistics. Only 43% of Rhode Island youth in foster care graduate from high school on time – compared to 84% of all students. Nationally, fewer than 1 in 10 earn a 2- or 4-year degree.

Behind those statistics are real youth in our community who deserve better. Imagine growing up without the “around the kitchen table” talks with family and caring adults that bring focus to goals, offer a pat on the back or a shoulder to cry on. And when needed, a nudge to stay on track. Who pays attention to classes and credits required to graduate? Placement moves make it hard to connect to a school community and not every school recognizes the ways that trauma affects how children do in the classroom. It's not surprising that too many youth disengage from school when no one is making their success a priority.

With new funding from RI Department of Children Youth and Families (RIDCYF) to expand our contract, Adoption Rhode Island (ARI) welcomed a third Education Specialist to the team to help more youth overcome barriers to their school success.

ARI's Teen Focus Education Specialists give teens that 'someone by their side' to believe in them. Being responsive, creative, persistent and centered on what each teen needs has looked like one-to-one support to get a capstone project completed on time, advocating for accommodations based on an IEP for the GED test, arranging for a quiet setting to study and wireless access to make it work, and helping to complete complicated paperwork for college and other programs.

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None of us asked to be in foster care. Each of our stories are different. I want people to know that kids in foster care are not disposable - that they matter...

...We all have potential - we just need help to reach it.”

This 18-year-old in Teen Focus is using her voice to be sure that youth in foster care are seen and heard, and that they all have what they need for their futures to be the best possible.

She is about to complete her Medical Assistant Training after completing high school last year. She just moved into her own apartment and is working - and staying connected to key supports in her life.

Read more inside:

-A community is building at Copley Chambers.
-New programs are added to the critical safety net ARI offers to RI youth and young adults who need us most.
-Extreme Family Finding® and 5 years of life-changing connections. And, more about what you make possible with all you do for the young people we serve.

With a place to call home at Copley Chambers, former foster youth are finding what they need to pursue their own dreams and goals.



Tanisha Dennis, Youth and Young Adult Support Specialist, is on-site at Copley to offer supportive services to keep tenants housed, moving towards more independence and reaching their goals.



Youth and Young Adult Services Department Manager Alex DeRita checks the Copley Food Pantry that West End Community Center helps to keep stocked.

Today 32 tenants, including parents with children, live in 26 apartments at Copley I instead of facing homelessness.

“What do we do here? Just about anything we can to knock down any barrier.” says Marcie Baker-Hinds, Adoption Rhode Island’s Project Coordinator for Youth and Young Adult Services,

A visit to the Adoption Rhode Island office at Copley Chambers is an experience in community, caring and hope.

Much of the community building has been happening right in ARI’s office at Copley where tenants have built friendships and come to be a resource to one another. Like a tenant offering childcare so that a neighbor can complete schoolwork. Two moms arranging to share transportation so that they and their children can attend an ARI hosted cookout. Shared meals with tenants pooling their resources at the end of the month. Arranging for rides together to the market, and helping hands welcoming new tenants.

Adoption Rhode Island’s office is a place where tenants feel safe when there are challenges or conflicts to work out. Often life-skills are learned in real time as problems are solved. Recently, a utility shut-off that should not have happened was navigated with ARI staff’s help. That led to ARI hosting a workshop open to all the tenants to learn about resources for assistance that they qualify for.

“What does having ARI here mean to me?

The help. I would say it’s the community. Every time I was hungry, they helped me. I needed clothes, they put some clothes on my back.

So I would say that what they do is almost like a mother to me.

It’s love. I never like to ask people for things. But ARI, I know they’ve got my back. *Comments shared by a Copley tenant about the resources and team he counts on.*

Helping tenants with individual plans for education, career and permanency goals. From registering for a CNA course at a community agency to gathering the documents needed. Tenants are working to complete GED requirements or getting help to register for the next semester of their college courses. Jobs are a major goal for tenants.

Read more on page 3



Since opening, Copley Chambers has been home to 40 young adults, all formerly in foster care. With support from ARI’s staff, several tenants have moved to other housing, including Copley II and III, or independent apartments. Making apartments and services at Copley I available to help more former foster youth.

Developed by Marathon Construction and Development, Copley Chambers I opened in early 2023. Marathon CEO Harry Angevine’s vision for solutions to the housing crisis facing youth leaving foster care led to ARI’s partnership as an on-site provider offering supportive services to tenants.

“Following a visit with ARI staff at Copley Chambers, I am convinced and extremely proud that I made the right decision to invest in the work being done there.

Just a few years ago I became aware of the needs of young adults and what this project could mean for them if ARI had the resources to bring them these opportunities.

Today I can see what these young people are achieving. I see the concrete results of the hard work of ARI staff to meet those needs. It's why I am continuing my support. A job well done.”
-Carol A. Peterson



-Carol A. Peterson visits the Copley Chambers office with Alex DeRita. Carol was an initial donor helping to launch Copley Chambers Supportive Services.



Newfound independence and hope began for 'L' after finally finding a safe place to live ...

Copley continued:

Conversations often start between tenants about how the job search is going. Advice is offered, and sometimes job leads. In a more planned way, tenants are supported by ARI in finding a job. Beginning with help recognizing the experience and skills they already have. *Newfound independence and hope began for 'L' after finally finding a safe place to live* meant it was possible to think about a job. L began working with the ARI team to build a resume and practice interview skills - soon leading to a good job and more financial stability. Next came ARI's help to successfully resolve legal and financial barriers to having their own transportation.

Youth and Young Adult Services Department Manager Alex DeRita describes the work that Tanisha and Marcie are doing as driven by the young people who are seeking services. **“Earning their trust is key before they are ready to look into their past and possible connections and begin answering their questions of ‘who am I?’ and ‘where do I belong?’”**



Nearly 70% of tenants are employed or enrolled in school. Several are also juggling pregnancy or new parenting.

Young mothers have maintained custody of their children because of the stability and support at Copley.

The path is different for each journey, but the goals are shared. Learning essential life-skills, working towards educational and career goals, and keeping young families together. At the same time finding connections and building strong relationships with family or those who become family.

ARI's Copley team encouraged a tenant to take a first step in finding a sibling they'd lost contact with. They began with a phone call to another family member that had been found. They sat together during the call with Tanisha and Marcie offering encouragement and prompts—actually holding up written “cue cards.” Breaking the ice with that first call led to talking with several relatives, and eventually finding a sibling living out of state. Now they have regular visits in the sibling's home state with hopes for future get-togethers in Providence soon.

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Marcie notes, **“We are where they are, right here on-site.** That makes us the first stop for tenants for a range of issues. If we can help, we do. And if we aren't the ones who can help, we'll connect them to someone who can.” Adding, “They need to believe we will follow through. *Will you really help me?* A lot of people have let them down. We give them time to know that we won't.”

ARI's latest chapter in caring for children who have experienced trauma gives more families what they need to grow, heal and thrive together.

ARI announces licensing as a Behavioral Health Organization and adds new programming to better meet needs for trauma-informed clinical care and family support.



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Our growth means we are supporting more children, teens and families at whatever point they need us, with even more tested and proven tools available to our team.” notes ARI Clinical Director Melissa Santoro. Adding, “Earning our BHO license recognizes the quality of our programs and the depth of our staff expertise. It’s not an exaggeration to say that what we are doing saves families - and lives.”

Two new initiatives support children and families no matter where they are in their journey. **Thriving Together**, a new program funded by RI DCYF and **Everkind**, funded by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, are keeping children from coming into, or back into, foster care. These programs are meeting needs for families to find trauma-informed services and treatments that work for them.

Thriving Together gives caregivers access to a menu of clinical and support services so that everyone in a child’s circle has what they need to best keep children thriving and families strong – before and after adoption or guardianship is final. And, even to help prevent child-welfare involvement. With this model a Parent Resource Advocate has joined the team - an advocate with an appreciation of different caregiver roles, including Kinship.

Everkind, offers post-permanency support as a program of Permanency Services. A new Family Support Specialist on the team means specialized support is there for families who came together through our Wendy’s Wonderful Kids® program to meet their unique needs.

Hallmark of ARI’s clinical and therapy programs remains unchanged. ARI stays through placement and caregiver changes to ensure the best outcomes for youth. A commitment made possible because of donors and funders.



M’s Story. A path forward to healing for a child and grandparent after trauma shatters a family.

As a very young child M was suddenly left in her grandparent’s care after the passing of one parent, and the other turning to substances in an unsuccessful struggle to cope. **A grandparent now suddenly faced with a life-changing and unexpected parenting role while also dealing with grief and loss of their own.**

Play Therapy with M first helped her to explore the significant changes in her life. With her ARI clinician she could express her complex feelings – some that were showing up as challenging behaviors. At the same time, the team supported the grandparent’s journey, including what it meant to see their own child struggle with wellness and navigate her relationship as M’s mother.

Over several years – because ARI stays with a family as long as needed – **their needs evolved and the team met them where they were, with what they needed.**

Circumstances and custody arrangements changed more than once. But ARI’s work with all involved in M’s care – grandparent, birth dad, RI DCYF and other providers – continued uninterrupted. With M’s needs always at the center. Eventually, permanency and stability were finalized for M with her grandparent.

Moving forward with healing and the stability of permanency.

M, now school-aged and an engaging, bright, strong child, is needing less intensive supports and services. With ARI’s unique commitment to being there when needed, this now thriving family knows that if the time comes to ask for help, our team will be here for them.

Long days outdoors, making friends around a campfire, immersed in a special interest, or nurturing a talent.

Whether you donated to our Camp Fund A Need at the Gala or gave to a special campership request, you gave a child happy memories, a feeling of belonging and most of all – the chance to just be a kid for a few special summer weeks.



Their experiences were as special and unique as each of the young people who had a summer to remember thanks to you.

Thirty-one campers from 7 to 17 spent part of their summer at day camps and overnight camps across Rhode Island. They enjoyed crafts, games, outdoor activities and making new friends around a campfire. For some it was weeks of horseback riding or mastering martial arts skills. Visual and fine art and other talents were nurtured in art camps, while other campers shined at sports camps.

Learn more about making a summer to remember the gift you give to a child. bgieseke@adoptionri.org

FOREVER SIBLINGS

A beautiful summer day found siblings who live apart in foster care coming together at Lincoln Woods for fun, laughter, heartwarming reunions and memorable moments. For some youth who attended, the annual Forever Siblings Birthday Bash is one of the few days each year they are able to be with their siblings.



This year was especially poignant for staff. It was just a little over a year since we lost our beloved colleague Amanda Choiniere who was so dedicated to this program.

The Amanda Choiniere Bee Kind Fund for Children at the RI Foundation, established in her memory, contributed to making the day possible. More activities over the coming months are planned.

Learn more about the Amanda Choiniere Bee Kind Fund that supports sibling activities.



A camper's Aunt says thank you.

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When I was bringing my 14-year-old nephew for his week at sleep-away camp he was excited and nervous. He hoped to make s'mores and friends. When I picked him up at the end of the week he did not want to go home. I watched as he hugged a few friends goodbye and listened as all the way home he chatted about the songs he learned and the things he had done.

His favorite activities were fishing and archery. I noticed he had small slips of paper with friends' phone numbers written on them, because all the kids left their cell phones at home for the week. Just as camp should be, they were able to unplug, have fun and just be kids.

Thank you to Adoption Rhode Island for making this special week of memories happen for him. He is already looking ahead to next year with hopes to go to camp again.”

ART is a powerful tool for healing that our team can bring to youth thanks to you.

Angelica Spirito, LMHC and Angela Gomes, BSW shared a Sand Art activity at the Providence Children's Museum's recent Mental Health Wellness Fair.



They explained that layering the sand colors and textures is not only soothing and relaxing, it is a great way to promote conversation between caregivers and children.

Led by Emily Natale, LMHC, ATR and ARI's Lesley Lopez, LCSW a recent 8-week Art Therapy Group held at ARI helped teens use creative expression to *Explore Boundaries, Build Healthy Relationships, and Find Your Voice* through Multi-Media Expressions.



Continued from page 1, Teen Focus Expands.

Expanding this program means that we will keep more young people from leaving care to poor outcomes. Teen Focus will include teens in the juvenile justice system so that they have the chance for better opportunities as they prepare for their future. It is another way we are working with our partners to break the cycle that too often is a path from foster care to prison.

The Teen Focus team of Education and Permanency Specialists are equipped to meet youth where they currently are. **While working on school success, teens are also supported by their Permanency Specialists** to identify people in their lives to offer permanency, whether with family or lifelong connections they build that become like family.



Never accepting that giving up is an option. Never accepting that hopelessness will win.

Five years after launching, ARI's Extreme Family Finding® program continues its deep investigative work and wrap-around support to give youth back missing pieces of their lives.



A high-school teen taking to the field this fall is realizing a long-time dream to play school sports. A reality now that he's not worried about how long he'll be at a school before moving again. Finding a past connection who is becoming a permanent part of his life has meant that he now has someone who cares enough to be sure he has this chance. He's making new friends and better choices because he's motivated by the support of his teammates and his place on the team.

For the first time a young teen is learning they can count on someone. Each week without fail a recently discovered adult sibling drives long distance so that the two of them can enjoy breakfast together. Rebuilding family bonds that had been broken years before began with investigative work. Finding several extended family members led to this sibling. Together they attended ARI events and were both supported by the Extreme Family Finding team as they got to know each other and found a place in each other's lives.

A teen who for a very long time only had one regular visitor during years in foster care and through many placements now has regular visits both virtual and in-person from a network of extended family members and even a past teacher. With shared stories and even shared photos he is on a path to healing. And these new connections are coming to know him as the smart, funny, and unique young man his team had already come to know.

Extreme Family Finding at ARI continues through RI DCYF funding and donor support.

BREAKING NEWS

RI selected to share lessons learned and best practice with national audience.

ARI's Shannon Doherty and Lou Stravato were selected to share their experience as the Adoption Rhode Island team that launched Extreme Family Finding in Rhode Island.

They will be presenting *"Blending Investigative and Social Work Skills for Effective Permanency Practices with Kin."* in a workshop at the April National Adoption Association (NAA) Conference in Boston.

 *"I stand before you today knowing that I am loved."*



Photo credit: <https://derecola.photo>

“When an individual is well loved, genuinely cared for, and empowered with support, it changes the trajectory of their future. The work Adoption Rhode Island is doing reaches so far beyond the placement of children in loving homes and matching them with forever families. It begins before those children enter their care and nurtures their growth and development through every season.”

-Kimberly Donald

and her daughter Kyra, from their speech at ARI's 2025 Gala.

"I stand before you today knowing that I am loved. I am significant. I am an overcomer. I know my past does not define me. My mental health challenges do not define me. My struggles have become my strength. And I know that no matter what I face in the future, I am going to be ok."

With sharing of expertise, strong advocacy and commitment to professional development we are building Rhode Island's capacity to create better outcomes for youth in foster care.



Photo credit: Emily Martineau

Appointed to the Special Legislative Commission to Study Educational Outcomes for Children in State Care, ARI CEO Darlene Allen is working alongside other leaders committed to creating better outcomes for RI foster youth.



Knowing that education is a key to better outcomes, ARI was proud to advocate for the Foster Youth Scholarship Program at RI College. Funded by the State of RI, this partnership between the College, RI DCYF and the RI Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner offers a path to degree completion to former foster youth. A second cohort of youth started in September.

The Center for Advanced Practice at Adoption Rhode Island launches online course for child welfare professionals.



From Lived Experience to Informed Practice (FLETIP) was created with experts and lived- and living- experience trainers. The e-learning course includes 5 self-paced and interactive modules. CEUs for the certificate course are available through our partnership with RI College.

We are proud that our course will be made available by RI EOHHS and RI DCYF to members of the child-welfare and children's mental health workforce in 2026.

Learn more about the course:



Visit: <https://thecenter-ari.org/resources/courses/>

Contact: ktavares@adoptionri.org

Adoption Rhode Island builds capacity to better support our community

Recently most of our staff completed training to become Mental Health First Aiders.

Instructors from the Bradley Learning Exchange offered powerful training sessions preparing staff with knowledge and practical tools to help someone developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis.



The training was provided to staff in roles across the organization including direct service, support, administration, operations and advancement. With this training we are better equipped to respond as a community-based organization in a real-life situation where aid is needed - ready to help clients, peers and colleagues, supporters and visitors.

Depth of caring from our community surrounds young people with kindness. We really could not do it without you.

New suitcases and gift cards donated at this summer's 10th Annual Duffle Bag Bash will get to more than 1000 youth in foster care. Each sending a message to a young person that "you matter."

“Imagine you are a young person who must leave home and are uncertain where you're going. Your clothes and personal belongings are tossed in a garbage bag for that move. It feels your belongings are not important – translate – you are not important.

Having a suitcase, duffle bag or backpack seems like a small thing, but sends a huge message to our young people that they do matter. They are important. **I truly appreciate the Duffle Bag Bash and I know the youth appreciate receiving the bags as it makes a life-changing situation a little bit easier and a little less stigmatizing.**

-Jessica Nash,

Associate Director, Division of Youth Development, DCYF

The Duffle Bag Bash is a collaboration between the RI Office of the Child Advocate, Lise Iwon and ARI, with Cardi's Furniture and Mattresses and so many generous sponsors and donors who offer food, drink, volunteers, music, fun and more to make the day a success.

Gathering to Give Spring Gala 2025. A great night for ARI's mission.

More than 350 guests enjoyed Spring Gala 2025 in May. Tremendous generosity at the fun, festive and inspirational night raised \$225,000 that is already having a direct impact in the lives of children and young people in foster care.



Our thanks to RI Monthly for coverage of the Gala. See photos in their September issue



**Save the Date
for Gala 2026**

**May 7, 2026
Rhodes on the Pawtuxet**

**Event sponsorships are now available!
bgieseke@adoptionri.org**



**Change a life today.
You'll make a difference for generations to come.**

It starts with a safe place to call home and people to count on.

And you by our side. Together we will give them a path forward to the success they deserve. Because no young person should leave foster care to homelessness, loneliness or hopelessness.

Don't let time run out on their future.

Give today to transform a life.

Use the enclosed envelope or scan to donate:



70 ½ or older?

Ask your tax or financial advisor if a Qualified Minimum Distribution from your IRA is a way to make your donation at the end of the year with a tax break for you.

**KEYS TO HOPE
LEGACY SOCIETY**
ADOPTION RHODE ISLAND

Honoring your legacy of love.

Join our Keys to Hope Legacy Society. Remembering Adoption Rhode Island in your will, or making a beneficiary designation or other charitable legacy gift is a way for your love and the hope you bring to the life of a child to continue for generations to come.

**November is
National Adoption
Month!**



**Statehouse Celebration
& Awards Ceremony, Nov. 20 at 5PM**
adoptionri@adoptionri.org to learn more

**Watch
THE
Video**



Meet young people telling their stories and using the power of their voices and experiences to make change and help others.

Our thanks to David Davignon and the Massimoto Media team for donating their talent to produce our latest video.

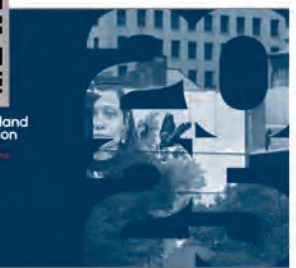
What others are saying:

**Did you read the article about
Adoption Rhode Island
in the latest RI Foundation
publication?**

Click [here](#) or scan to read "The Power of Connection" from Ines Merchan and Daniel Kertzner.



**Rhode Island
Foundation**
2025 Program



Stories in this newsletter are real experiences with some identifying details changed to protect privacy. When possible photos of actual events are used and captioned. Other photos are stock photos used to represent stories.



RI DCYF is a major funding and service partner for many of our programs and services.



Adoption Rhode Island
Children First, and Always.

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